



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
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**MEDIA CONTACTS**  
Jared Touchin | 928.221.9253  
Krista Thompson | 928.637.5603  
Jolene Holgate | 928.871.7160  
nnlb.communications@gmail.com

**Naabik'iyáti' Committee approves the Healthy Diné Nation Act of 2013**  
*Legislation moves on to the Navajo Nation Council for final consideration*

**WINDOW ROCK** – Naabik'iyáti' Committee members on Thursday approved Legislation No. 0289-13, amending Title 24 of the Navajo Nation Code by enacting the Healthy Diné Nation Act of 2013.

If approved by the Navajo Nation Council and signed into law, the Healthy Diné Nation Act of 2013 would assess a two-percent sales tax on various “junk foods” on the Navajo Nation with tax revenue to be used for community wellness projects.

Prior to the discussion, legislation sponsor Council Delegate Danny Simpson (Becenti, Crownpoint, Huerfano, Lake Valley, Nageezi, Nahodishgish, Tse'ii'ahi, Whiterock) introduced a group of high school students from Navajo Preparatory School, Inc. who shared health statistics and personal testimonies about loved ones living with diabetes and other health issues.

“How do we address the epidemic of diabetes and obesity on our reservation?” asked Delegate Simpson. “This is one way to combat what is happening today. This two-percent [tax] isn't going to make a lot of money, but it's a start.”

Although Council Delegate Leonard Tsosie (Baca/Prewitt, Casamero Lake, Counselor, Littlewater, Ojo Encino, Pueblo Pintado, Torreon, Whitehorse Lake) said he supports “healthy living”, he opposed the legislation comparing it to the Nation's pawning industry which deteriorated after heavy policies were instituted to regulate the industry.

“When the Navajo Nation and the federal government started the pawning regulations all the pawning businesses went off and they went to the border towns and there's nothing much we can do in regulating pawning now,” said Delegate Tsosie. “This is going to benefit border towns.”

Speaking in favor of the legislation, Council Delegate Alton Joe Shepherd (Jeddito, Cornfields, Ganado, Kin Dah Lichíí, Steamboat) drew attention to the two-percent tax, saying the proposed tax would not be a substantial increase in terms of dollars and cents and called it an “investment in our communities.”

“A 12-pack of soda is about \$5.99 and if you do the math it's just an increase of 11 cents,” said Delegate Shepherd. “We're talking about going to the border towns, but yet we're investing more tax dollars into something that doesn't come back here to the Navajo Nation.”

Council Delegate Jonathan Nez (Shonto, Navajo Mountain, Oljato, Ts'ah Bii Kin) said he supports the intent of the legislation. However, he also said he believes healthy living is a personal choice

and that the decision over the two-percent tax increase should be left to the people in the form of a referendum.

“Let the people decide whether they impose a tax on themselves. All it is is a self-choice. Get out there and run. Get out there and measure your food intake,” said Delegate Nez. “We got to start somewhere and this is a good start.”

Council Delegate Dwight Witherspoon (Black Mesa, Forest Lake, Hardrock, Pinon, Whippoorwill) questioned if the two-percent increase would be enough to impact behavior, while providing examples of other taxes imposed by states to discourage the use of alcohol and tobacco.

“For tobacco, Arizona charges \$2.00 per pack and in New Mexico it’s \$1.66 per pack and the tax for tobacco on Navajo is \$1.00 so two-percent is not going to make a behavioral change that we’re seeking,” said Delegate Witherspoon.

Delegate Witherspoon continued on to say that if the Nation truly wanted to make a behavioral change, a 20-percent increase would be necessary at the minimum.

Prior to voting on the main motion, Naabik’iyátí’ Committee members approved two amendments including adding swimming pools to the list of potential “community wellness projects” that would be funded by the tax revenue.

The second amendment establishes a sunset clause for the proposed tax increase, set to expire at the end of calendar year 2018, unless extended by the Council.

Naabik’iyátí’ Committee members voted 12-6 to approve Legislation No. 0289-13. The legislation now moves on to the Navajo Nation Council for final consideration.

Prior to considering Legislation No. 0289-13, the Naabik’iyátí’ Committee also approved Legislation No. 0213-13, the proposed bond financing bill to authorize the issuance of bonds for \$220 million to fund certain debts and to finance economic development and infrastructure projects.

The bond financing legislation also moves on to the Navajo Nation Council for final consideration.

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